three area development programmes viz. Integrated wastelands Development Programme (IWDP) the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP).

Environmental Performance Index

628. SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that a pilot nation by nation study of environmental performance named 2006 Environmental Performance Index shows *inter-alia* that India ranks amongst the 20 lowest scoring countries in the critical environmental goals ranging from clean drinking water, low ozone levels to sustainable fisheries and low greenhouse gas emissions;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof and the reasons therefor; and

(c) what steps Government propose to take to improve its rankings?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) Yes Sir.

(b) The Pilot 2006 Environmental Performance Index has been developed by the Center for Environmental Law & Policy at Yale University and the Center for International Earth Science Information Network (CIESIN) at Columbia University in collaboration with the World Economic Forum and the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission. Using 16 indicators, six core policy categories and the two broad objectives of Environmental Health and Eco-system Vitality, the Environmental Performance Index Framework has ranked India 118 out of a total of 133 countries.

The position of the countries at the bottom of the rankings has been attributed by the authors to several factors such as low Environmental Health scores, densely populated industrializing countries with stressed ecosystems, arid states with limited natural resource endowments, lack of capacity for aggressive pollution control or systematic natural resource management.

(c) The Government of India accords high priority to environment protection and sustainable development. These concerns are duly reflected in our planning process. The Government of India has already

taken a series of steps, including establishment of a regulatory framework to address these concerns.

Loss of Wetlands

629. SHRIMATI JAYA BACHCHAN: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENTS AND FOREST be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that we are on the verge of losing our wetlands in the country like Europe which lost 80 per cent of its wetland in the last century;

(b) if not, what are the details of the ongoing wetland projects receiving attention of Government for their preservation; and

(c) what are the details of the wetland projects being preserved under Ramsar Convention to which India is a signatory?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) No, Sir. However the wetlands in the country are facing threats due to biotic factors like over-exploitation, encroachments, siltation and discharge of industrial effluents as also abiotic factors.

(b) The Ministry of Environment & Forests implements a scheme on Conservation & Management of Wetlands under which 71 wetlands covering 22 States to the country have been identified for undertaking conservation activities to check further degradation. Assistance on 100% grant basis is given for activities like survey & demarcation, protection, siltation control, pollution abatement catchment area treatment, de-weeding, biodiversity conservation, supplementary and alternate livelihood support for people dependent on wetlands, community participation and education & awareness.

An amount of Rs. 43.16 crores has been released from 1987-88 to 2005-06 for conservation and management of identified wetlands in the country for various conservation activities.

(c) So far, 25 sites have been identified from India as Ramrasr sites under Ramsar convention which include: Ashtamudi, Sasthamkotta & Vembanad-Kol (Kerala) Chilika Lake & Bhitarkanika Mangroves (Orissa), Bhoj Wetland (M.P), Deepor Beel (Assam) Harike, Kanjli & Ropar